

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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Rooted in Resolution

Stephanie Berkhout



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I think I can safely say we were all pretty excited to show 2020 the door and welcome in a new, hopeful year. COVID-19 changed many of our plans for how we celebrated the holidays, as well as how many people we could cheer with in-person at 12:00 a.m. January 1.

That being said, one thing the coronavirus couldn't inhibit is the inclination for many of us to create a New Year's resolution. Build up the savings account, read a book per week or no electronics before bed ... often these objectives are personal in nature and come with the intention of improving your lifestyle, one way or another.

There tends to be a common list of typical goals for individuals. I've listed a few below, but in the work setting! As we coined our own plans for continuous improvement in 2021, I realized: Qualitree seems to have New

Year's resolutions that could fit into these themes, too.

Lose some weight

Let's first make something very clear: We're beautiful just the way we are, but sometimes we carry a little weight in spots that just aren't healthy. Of course, I'm talking about the media in our trays and pots! We're addressing the weight of our containers and propagation trays in a few ways. Preventing compaction of media at fill-time is imperative for crop health, as it impacts how much air could be available within the container. There's a saying from Will Healy that's always worth repeating: "Fish grow in water, roots grow in air!"

Weighing our containers with the ideal fill and using that as a benchmark will help us with quality control, preventing the scenario of too much soil in the pot. In a 5-in. pot, we've noted that 50 g (1.76 oz.) can make the difference between the ideal vs. an over or under fill. Of course, a key part of this is ensuring our media comes in fairly consistently at the same moisture. Additionally, if we hit the weight target, but are pressing the media at planting or mishandling trays at set-down, we're shooting ourselves in the foot.

Learn a new language

The language of growing! We're learning to grow things in new ways as we adapt to world and industry changes, as well as aiming for more sustainable practices. A stellar example would be reducing plastic use in propagation chambers by opting for a VPD/high pressure fog controlled environment, as opposed to plastic tenting the trays.

While not all of our crop types are successfully VPD-only in this method (yet?), small changes have made a considerable difference in how we manage our young plants for the better.

We're also homing in on our fertilizer consumption, overall fertility program and continuing to expand our in-house biological rearing program. Targeting our water usage and quality, introducing scales for water management, the list seems endless ... the learning curve of growing is one that should never be flattened!

Spend more time with family

I'm not going to spin this one into a horticulture-specific scenario, but simply speak to this one as is. In the thick of the busy season (year-round?), it's difficult to check out for a breather from work and share some quality, unplugged time with loved ones. We've been working on this. The importance of cross training was punctuated last year while we navigated COVID and continues to drive our efforts moving forward into 2021.

On the growing team, we've compiled what we've now dubbed the "stoplight chart." A series of columns that indicate skills, growing locations or knowledge that all contribute to keeping our day-to-day flowing and mitigate risk. If a person is proficient, they're green. Could cover for a weekend with a couple of questions? Yellow. Have yet to learn? Red. Putting this together creates a simple visual that shows where there may be weak spots and where we need to build bench strength. We then seek and destroy by getting more people in-the-know. It's a constantly evolving chart as we add more critical points and develop our skills. The goal is to go green! Last year, despite world events, we ended up being more flexible for vacation/emergency coverage purposes than ever before.

Be kind, 2021. Reflecting on the past year makes me realize just how much resolve we have. We can dig our heels in and make the most of things. New Year's resolution in mind or not, I wish you all a year of success, health and fortitude. Cheers to a year of continued optimism and improvement! **GT**

Stephanie Berkhout is Indoor Spaces Lead Grower for Qualitree Propagators in Rosedale, British Columbia, Canada.